Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for producing whey powder, comprising the steps of:

a) providing a whey concentrate containing lactose with a dry matter content of at least 45%,

b) crystallizing the lactose ~~which is present in the whey concentrate~~,

c) finely dispersing the whey concentrate, and

d) drying the finely dispersed whey concentrate to form a whey powder with sufficient free moisture for recrystallization, with the aid of a drying gas,

wherein a heating step, in which the whey concentrate is held at a temperature of at least 75°C~~, in particular at least 85°C,~~ for a time of between 0.25 minute and 5 minutes, is carried out between step a) and step b).

2. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein at the end of the spray-drying step, the free moisture content is between 8% and 13%.

3. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the heating step the whey concentrate is held at a temperature of at least 75°C~~, in particular at least 85°C~~, for a time of between 0.5 and 4 minutes.

4. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the heating step the whey concentrate is heated to a temperature of more than 90°C, but less than 110°C.

5. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the heating step the whey concentrate is held at a temperature of between 90 and 95°C for a time of between 0.5 and 3 minutes.

6. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein prior to step b) a dry matter content of at least 55% is created in the whey concentrate.

7. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the whey concentrate is a concentrate of whey permeate.

8. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein fine particles which originate from the drying step and are entrained with the drying gas are filtered with the aid of a filter.

9. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein steps c) and d) are carried out by means of a spray-drying process, in which the whey concentrate is atomized in a drying chamber and drying gas is passed through the atomized whey concentrate, with the spray-dried whey concentrate being collected as a powder and the drying gas being discharged via a drying gas outlet.

10. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 8 wherein auxiliary gas is fed to the discharged drying gas in a quantity and at a temperature and relative atmospheric humidity which are such that the combination of the discharged drying gas with entrained

fine particles and the supplied auxiliary gas is outside the range in which the entrained fine particles are sticky.

11. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 8 wherein dry particles are fed to the discharged drying gas.

12. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 9 wherein the auxiliary gas and/or the dry particles are fed to an inlet, located in the vicinity of a drying chamber, of the drying gas discharge.

Claim 13-17. (Cancelled)

18. (New) A method for producing whey powder comprising:

(a) providing a whey concentrate containing lactose with a dry matter content of at least 45%;

(b) heating the whey concentrate to a temperature of at least 85°C and maintaining the whey concentrate at said temperature for a period of between 0.25 minute and 5 minutes;

(c) crystallizing the lactose;

(d) finely dispersing the whey concentrate; and

(e) drying the finely dispersed whey concentrate with a drying gas to form a whey powder with sufficient free moisture for recrystallization.

19. (New) The method according to claim 1, wherein the whey concentrate in the heating step is maintained at a temperature of at least 85°C for a period of between 0.5 and 4 minutes.

20. (New) The method according to claim 2, wherein the whey concentrate in the heating step is maintained at a temperature of at least 85°C for a period of between 0.5 and 4 minutes.